



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 19 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
19 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

The new round of Communist attacks has been directed thus far at targets in the southern provinces. Vinh Long in the delta and Phan Thiet on the coast east of Saigon have received the heaviest ground assaults. Casualties on both sides, however, have been considerably lighter than during the Tet offensive.

Saigon itself appears to be a high-priority enemy target. It received sporadic rocket and mortar fire overnight, and additional high-level Communist command elements have moved in nearer the city.

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The battle for the Citadel area of Hue continues to be indecisive.

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2. Soviet Union

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3. Pakistan

In a continuing effort to play down the seriousness of Ayub's illness, Pakistani newspapers over the weekend carried pictures of him in pajamas and robe with a newspaper in his lap. Defense Minister Khan--one of the three men currently holding the government reins--told Ambassador Oehlert that Ayub might wish to make a trip to Britain and the US as part of his recuperation. Khan suggested a meeting with the President might be arranged.

4. United Kingdom

A public opinion poll taken early this month gives the Tories a 22.5 percent lead--the greatest enjoyed by any party in the 31-year history of British polling. If this margin holds up, the Labor Party stands to lose five of the six seats for which by-elections are now pending.

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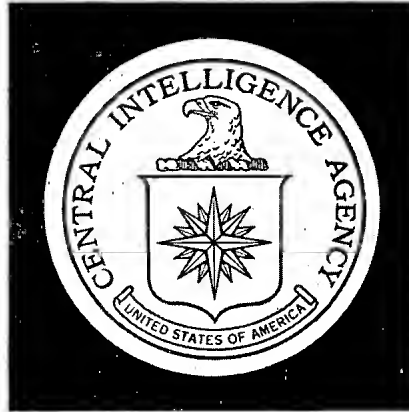
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5. Laos

Over the strong objections of the Polish member, the International Control Commission has voted to visit the embattled city of Saravane. A preliminary ICC group is headed that way today and the commissioners are expected to follow about mid-week. Thus far, Laotian Army forces still hold the city.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Communists Focus Attention on Northern South Vietnam: Despite the relative lull in new fighting so far in the northern part of South Vietnam, Vietnamese Communist propaganda continues to zero in on that area in particular. Recent Viet Cong and Hanoi broadcasts strongly imply that new military attacks will be accompanied by efforts to take over administrative control of wide areas in that part of the country.

The North Vietnamese party daily on 18 February carried an editorial praising "initial victories" in the current "general offensive and simultaneous uprisings" in central Vietnam (most of I and II Corps). It claimed that Communist forces have "turned the military and political tide" there and quoted a communiqué from the Communist command in that region saying that "vast rural areas" had been "liberated" and Saigon's control had been broken in a "string" of provincial capitals and towns. According to the paper, this put the Communists in a position to "overwhelm the enemy in many areas," and it promised even bigger and more resounding victories in the future.

Similarly, Hanoi came down hard on 18 February with an endorsement of the establishment of a new "People's Revolutionary Committee" of Thua Thien Province and Hue city, which was announced by the Viet Cong radio last week. The announcement claimed this committee was in process of taking over the administration of Thua Thien and Hue, and that Saigon's authority had been "liquidated" or was disintegrating. The new "provisional administration" allegedly has been set up under the auspices of the Hue city "National, Democratic, and Peace Alliance," a front group unveiled by the Communists at the opening of the Tet offensive. Le Van Hoa, who was surfaced earlier as head of the Hue "alliance," was also said to be chief of the new "revolutionary committee."

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Hanoi said the committee had decided to "wipe out the South Vietnamese administration structure at all levels," and to "recognize" new revolutionary committees allegedly being set up throughout the Thua Thien Province.

Much of this doubtless is sheer propaganda designed to bolster Communist claims that "revolutionary elements" from all parts of South Vietnamese society are rising up to topple the Thieu-Ky government. The persistence of the claims, however, and their continued evolution in the Thua Thien - Hue area suggests the Communists are determined to establish some sort of new political structure in this region through political agitation and organizational efforts now being conducted in both urban and rural areas.

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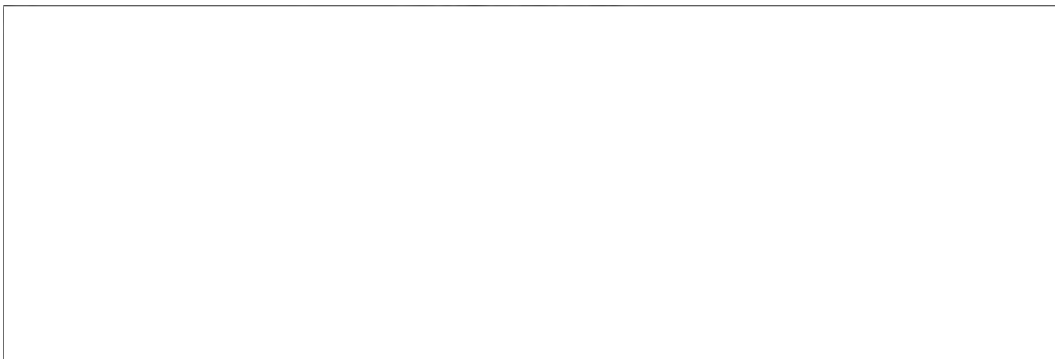


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Pham Van Dong on the San Antonio Formula: Father Berrigan, who has been in Hanoi in connection with the release of the US pilots, told the press about Pham Van Dong's statement, but the press has garbled the report. The following, according to Ambassador Sullivan, is the correct version: "President Johnson has given the impression that the San Antonio formula is an easy one to agree to. That formula however, is unacceptable. It imposes conditions. Johnson demands productive conversation. That imposes conditions. Only a conqueror can ask this. We repeat our demand for unconditional cessation of bombing. At that time we will talk seriously. When we make war, we do it seriously. So when we talk of peace, we will do that seriously."

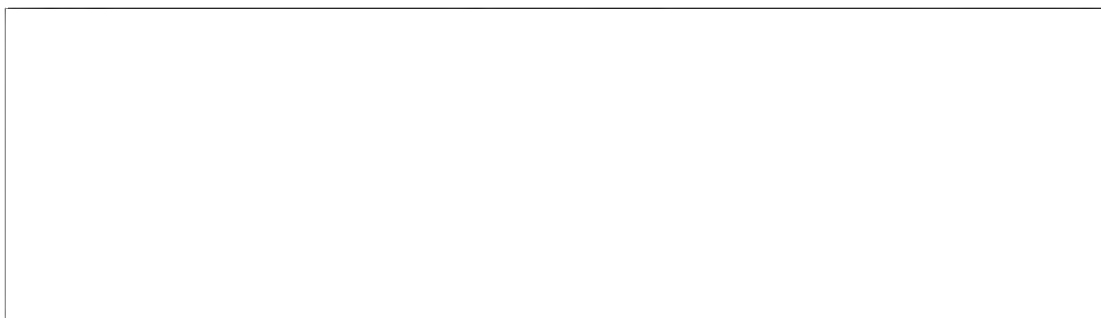
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More on Trinh's Interview of 8 February: The French ambassador in Laos informed Ambassador Sullivan last week that Foreign Minister Trinh did not answer one of the questions posed by the French correspondent. That question was about the level and the composition of the negotiating teams which Hanoi has in mind for the talks it says it will agree to after a US bombing halt. The question was designed to draw out Hanoi on the role it envisaged for the Liberation Front in the talks. In his response to the question, Trinh simply noted that he preferred not to answer it now, but "would be pleased to reconsider at a later date."

Ambassador Sullivan has the impression that Paris may be feeding questions to the French correspondent in Hanoi in an effort to smoke out answers of interest to French policy.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi on Antiwar Activities in the US: On Saturday, Hanoi's international broadcast service referred to a speech of 15 February by John Kenneth Galbraith. Hanoi reported that Galbraith had "pointed out that the Saigon regime would certainly be defeated

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and its army would disintegrate." The broadcast went on to say that Galbraith had also "stressed that the recent military offensive of the National Liberation Front testifies to the wide support being given the Front by the population."

The same broadcast claimed that more than 4,500 US law professors and students from 50 universities had signed a statement opposing US policies on Vietnam. The drive to collect signatures is continuing, the broadcast claimed.

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